

5 January 1968

MEMORANDUM

**SUBJECT: Comments on Saigon Embassy Telegram 14107,
5 January 1968 (EXDIS)**

1. We agree with the referenced cable's contention that there are signs of a further Communist build-up in South Vietnam suggesting the early launching of additional, widespread military action. We do not believe, however, that the 30 December statement of DRV Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh is tactically linked to this build-up or plans for near-term military action, though obviously the Communists will attempt to coordinate their military and their political actions in the months ahead. Nor would we expect any feelers toward talks to be accompanied by a slackening of the enemy's logistic and military resupply activities.

2. The enemy build-up to which the referenced cable calls attention is indisputable. We do not, however, have evidence to confirm any "massive" movement of truck traffic through Laos and believe the level of traffic to be at about the same level as the corresponding period of last year. Though we share the Mission's view that Khe Sanh is a likely Communist target, it is certainly not the only area marked for early attack. In addition to the

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extensive build-up of enemy forces in the vicinity of Khe Sanh, there is substantial evidence that the enemy is concentrating its forces for offensive operations in other parts of South Vietnam. In Quang Nam province, the 2nd NVA division, reinforced by the newly infiltrated 31st regiment of the 31st division, has massed in the Que Son Valley, probably for offensive operations. Significant contact has already occurred between elements of the 2nd NVA and US units operating in this area. In II Corps there have been increasing indications of enemy preparation for attack in the Dak To and the Plei Djeriing/Plei Mrong areas. A recent build-up of B-3 front forces in the mountains southeast of Kontum city may portend harassing attacks against Pleiku or Kontum. Furthermore, there are indications of a continuing enemy build-up in III Corps using troops dispatched from the B-3 front area. Communist units moving down from the highlands will probably reinforce the enemy's 4th, 7th and 9th divisions which operate in VC Military Region 10 (Binh Long, Phuoc Long and Quang Duc provinces). These divisions can be expected to continue attacks against friendly positions along the Cambodian frontier.

3. While we anticipate a further upsurge of enemy military activity in the next few weeks (i.e., between now and Tet) we are disinclined to infer too close a tactical relationship between a military build-up and recent Hanoi statements suggesting some movement in the DRV position regarding

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negotiations. In particular, we doubt seriously if Trinh's recent remarks were intended to serve as any kind of "smoke screen" to mask the military build-up in the south.

4. The Communists' military and political actions will continue to be interrelated in the future as they have always been in the past. The almost certainly impending spate of Communist military activity will be designed for maximum political effect. It should not be read, however, as a last-ditch effort to achieve a psychological victory primarily intended to strengthen the North Vietnamese hand in a negotiating situation.

5. We know from Communist speeches and captured documents that the over-all Communist "winter-spring" (1967-1968) military strategy is intended to frustrate allied ability to mount search and destroy operations and to thwart or undo progress in pacification. At a minimum, Communist military activity will be designed to achieve the appearance of "stalemate" in order to make it look as though the US effort in Vietnam is producing little tangible result. We would expect this strategy to be pursued whatever line Hanoi adopts with respect to negotiations.

6. Recent North Vietnamese actions and statements do suggest some movement on the negotiation front. During an intensive military campaign designed to maximize US frustration, Hanoi may dangle various kinds of

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bait on talks, though without offering any concessions on points of substance. In the process, Hanoi will hope to capitalize on domestic US political pressures and discontent with the war and, at a minimum, get the bombing stepped.

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